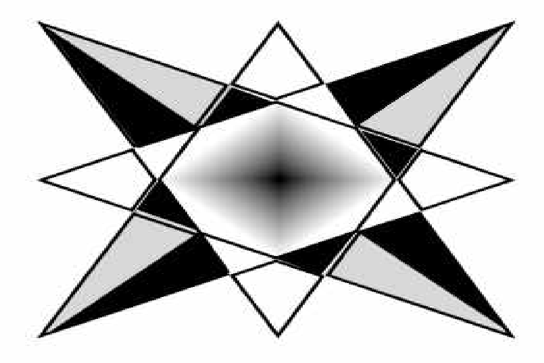
ISLAM:

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

by
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THE CREATION

Islam began when man's career on the earth began-more precisely at the time of man's creation and his descent. Allah created Adam and Eve and enjoined them to worship Him and live a life of obedience to the Divine Will.

Allah is the Creator and the Sustainer of the Universe and of human beings. Man must turn to him for sustenance and guidance. The very word Islam means obedience to God. In this respect, Islam is man's natural religion-the only natural course is for man to look towards Him for guidance.

The day Adam and Eve were sent down to live on earth, Allah told them they were His servants and He was their Master and Creator. He told them and mankind that the best course was for them to follow His guidance, to obey His orders and to refrain from what He had forbidden. God said to them that He would reward them. If, however, they did not heed His commands, He would be displeased and would punish them. This was the simple beginning of Islam.

Adam and Eve invited their children to follow the Islamic way of life. They and their children and their later generations followed the teachings of Islam as propounded by Prophet Adam (peace be upon him) for quite a long period of time. It was only later on that certain people began disobeying Allah. Some of them began worshipping other gods, while a few others even declared their freedom to do as they pleased - defying God's orders. This is how kufr (disbelief) came into being. Its essence lies in refusal to worship God - pursuing the path of defiance to the creator.

THE CREATOR

When kufr (disbelief) began to increase and multiply it affected the life of the society in a number of ways. Exploitation, oppression, viciousness, and immorality emerged in different forms. Life became intolerable. Allah then appointed some righteous people to preach the message of truth among the wrongdoers, invite them to the right path and convert them to God-fearing people - worshipping and obeying God alone. In short, they were asked to perform a mission - to make people righteous and true Muslims. These noble people entrusted with this great mission were called Prophets or Messengers of Allah. Allah sent these Prophets to different nations and countries. All of them were honest, truthful, and the people of noble character. All of them, preached the same religion - Islam. To mention a few names - Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. All of them were the Prophets of God and thousands of them were, over the centuries, sent into the world to guide mankind.

In the history of the last few thousand years, one can see the recurrent arrival of the Prophets whenever kufr (disbelief) increased and assumed menacing proportions. The Prophets tried to stop the tide of disbelief and invited people towards Islam. Some people adopted the Islamic way of life, but others rejected it. The people who followed the Prophets became Muslims and, after learning higher ethical and moral disciplines from them, began to preach and spread nobility and goodness. Having forgotten the teachings of Islam, later generations of Muslim themselves gradually sank into disbelief. Whenever such a situation arose, God sent a prophet or Messenger to revive Islam. This continual arrival of Messengers of God continued for thousands of years. In the course of those long years, Islam

was revived by those Prophets, who related the Message forgotten by their people. At long last God sent the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) who revived Islam in such an outstanding fashion that it still exists today and will continue to exist (God willing), till eternity.

Prophet Muhammad In Makkah

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was born in 571 C.E in the now famous city of Arabia called Makkah. Islam had no following in Arabia at that time nor did it have any following anywhere else in the world. Although the traces of teachings of the earlier Prophets could still be found among few pious people who tried to worship one and only one God and live a life of obedience to him, the true religion of God was lost in a maze of paganism and pantheism. The pure worship of God, unadulterated by shirk (worshipping of false gods), was nowhere to be found. Moral values had lost their grip and people were indulging in all sorts of lax behaviour and wickedness. Such was the situation in Arabia as also was the whole world at the close of the sixth century when God decided to send the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon you) as His last Messenger. He spent forty years of his life as a patient observer in the city of Makkah. Everyone respected him for his noble qualities of head and heart. But they were not aware that this man was destined to become the world's greatest leader.

During the years of his life, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) felt very much grieved to see the gross immorality of the world of his time. There was exploitation of man by man. There was injustice and tyranny. He was grieved and anxious, but was somewhat silent as he, too, was unable to devise a remedy for the ailing humanity of the day. At long last, God chose him as His Messenger. When he attained the age of forty, God entrusted him with the Mission of spreading Islam, the true religion of God, the religion of peace and justice, by means of the revelations which we now know as the Qur'an.

Having been appointed as the Messenger of God, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) started to communicate God's Message to his people in Makkah. He began by inviting them to worship none but God - their sole Creator and Master. People in general opposed him and tried to prevent him from spreading Islam. He however, continued his work with unflinching determination and dedication. As a result, many honest people gathered around him. They became his staunch supporters. The teachings of the Messenger of God spread slowly but surely outside his native Makkah to Arabia at large. Those who had a reputation for honesty and moral excellence began to accept the faith while opposition to them came from many ignorant people and vicious quarters. This continued for thirteen years. There was a gradual breaking of new ground. Islam was gaining a following all over Arabia. This is one side of the story. On the other hand, the defenders of the old order, people with vested interest and steeped in ignorant customs were hardening their opposition to Islam. Whenever new converts to Islam were presented, they were abused, humiliated, beaten, tortured, expelled and even put to death. Nevertheless, they remained firm and steadfast. At last the Makkan elders devised a plot to assassinate the Messenger of God in order to nip the Islamic movement in the bud. When affairs reached the pitiful state, God ordered His Messenger to leave Makkah and migrate to Madinah.

Having learned that the Prophet was planning to migrate from Makkah, its leaders expedited their plans to murder him on his journey outward. However, their disgraceful conspiracy could not succeed.

The Prophet arrived at Madinah safe and sound. This is the most famous migration (hijrah) in the history of Islam. The Muslim calender begins from that day, the year being numbered "After Hijrah" (A.H).

Prophet Muhammad in Madinah

Madinah, a city some 450 kilometres from Makkah, was growing as a centre for Islam. A number of people had already been converted to the new faith. Islamic teachings were winning new supporters every day. Leaders of the two major tribes of Madinah had accepted Islam and were ready to sacrifice their lives and property for the cause of Islam. At this point, the Prophet started planning to move to Madinah.

As soon as the Prophet settled in Madinah, the new Muslims started to flock into the city from the four corners of Arabia. This further strengthened the new centre. Islam was no longer a persecuted religion; it was able to obtain a firm foothold and was provided with the historic opportunity to establish an Islamic State and society. This constitutes the most important development of the post-Hijrah period. The leaders of Makkah, the defenders of the old order, did not miss the significance of this change. They realised that a new model was being set up, which would be a challenge to the way they were running their society. This caused a great anxiety among them. They decided to crush this rising force while it was still in its infancy. For they believed that it would be easy to crush the Muslims while they were few and far between and lacked a centralised power. Now things were changing. Muslims were concentrating at one place and organising a new society with its own government. The prospects of annihilating such a state, once it was firmly entrenched looked remote to them. The unbeliever feared that if the Muslims were allowed to gain momentum they would become a great power. Consequently they hurried to band themselves together with view to eradicating the embryonic Islamic government at Madinah. The Makkan leaders lost no time in issuing a clarion call to their kith and kin and to all supporters of the old order in neighbouring towns and all over Arabia to rally round them to form a force which could crush the Muslims. They formed a band of cavalry which invaded Madinah and its environs time and again with all their military might. They, however, could not defeat the Prophet and his loyal supporters. In spite of all efforts on the part of the unbeliever, Islam continued to spread in Arabia. The good, honest folk continued to forsake Kufr (disbelief) and come in to the fold of Islam.

Emergence of an Islamic Society

Eventually, Islam gained a crowning success when the Prophet entered victoriously into Makkah- once the strong hold of Kufr. This all happened within eight years of the establishment of the Islamic State of Madinah. No sooner had Makkah submitted to the Islamic force than the remaining hostile groups of unbeliever of Arabia began to surrender. Within the next year, the whole of Arabia accepted Islam and the muslims established a powerful government of some twelve hundred thousand square miles.

Arabia had the most singular government of the time, based as it was on the principle of the sovereignty of God and the vicerengency (Khalifa) of man. The law of the land was Islam. The administration of the state lay in the hands of the honest and pious people. The country had no trace of violence, oppression injustice or immorality. Peace, justice, truth and honesty reigned supreme everywhere. Many of the people of the country had come to possess highest moral attributes because they were honest in worshipping God and obeying Him.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) changed the character of Arabian life in a short period of only twenty three years. He instilled in the people a spirit that helped to serve the cause of Islam. They set out with a great mission of spreading Islam all over the entire world. The Prophet passed away at the age of sixty three, after completing the greatest mission of all time.

Preservation of Sources

The companions of the Prophet took up the mission of the Prophet after his death. They travelled to distant lands to spread the Islamic teachings. They succeeded wherever they went. Obstacles that stood in their way in spreading Islam were all surmounted. Islam became so strong in such a short while that no one dared try to stop its growth. The Muslims were spread out from India to Spain. They changed the face of the globe. The entire population of the countries they visited were so much impressed by their good example and noble behaviour that they began to enter quickly into the fold of Islam. Wherever the Muslims went, they took their highest moral attributes with them so much so that immorality and injustice dissolved in their presence. They transformed Godless people in to God-conscious people and gave them the light of the Knowledge and strength of character. They changed their way of life so that virtue and goodness could prevail. The hands of the oppressors were held and a reign of justice and fair play established. This was the greatest achievement in the history of mankind.

The Companions of the Prophet rendered yet another great service to mankind. This consisted in memorising the Qur’an and preserving it in its original form as it was revealed to the Prophet. They wrote down the Qur’an word for word and did not even miss a mark in its Arabic orthography. Today, we are most fortunate in having the Qur'an exactly as it was revealed to the Prophet, written and read in the same language and the same diction as it was written and read in the time of the Prophet about 1400 years ago.

Another important aspect of their work was to preserve and communicate to posterity the most detailed account of the Prophet’s life, speeches, instructions, commands and morals and behaviour. These accounts by the Prophets companions are grouped together under the all embracing title of Sunnah or Hadith (Traditions of the Prophet).This is the greatest record ever preserved about the life and activities of a man and is a great blessing to every generation. For even after laps of 1400 years after the Prophets’ death, people can still hear his teachings as the companions of the Prophet saw and heard them during his life time. Now anybody can approach Hadith literature and find out the Islamic point of view on any subject. He can learn how to become obedient to God and what type of man is liked by God.

The Qur’an and the Hadith are things of greatest importance to a Muslim. With their preservation and security (God has promised to secure and preserve them), Islam is protected for all time to come. In the days before the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Islam

was forgotten again and again after being revived, owing to lack of necessary care regarding the preservation and security of the earlier revealed books and the details of the lives of their Prophets. This was the reason why, after Prophet, generations following forgot the real teachings and drifted towards a life devoid of good morals and norms of behaviour. But, Islam, as revived by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), is bound to last forever because of the Book of God and the traditions of the Prophet are both secure and preserved in their original purity.

Finally

The Islamic way of life can be revived and reconstructed again with the help of the Qur'an and the traditions if ever, God forbid, the freshness of its true spirit wanes. The world no longer requires any new Prophet to revive Islam to its pristine glory. It is enough to have among us the learned people who know the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet and who are able to apply their teachings to their own lives and stimulate others to adopt and apply them in their lives as well. This is how the stream of Islam will continue to flow, refreshing the eternal thirst of mankind.

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For a brief look at the fundamental teachings of Islam, please read:
"Towards Understanding Islam"
by Sayyid Mawdudi
Available free on Request